

Ferndown Upper School

Cherry Grove, Ferndown, Dorset, BH22 9EY

Inspection dates 9–10 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- Achievement is inadequate because both past and current students have not made sufficient progress, especially in English.
- Teaching is inadequate because too often work is not set at the right level of difficulty for different abilities, especially the most and the least able
- Progress for many groups of students, especially students who are eligible for the pupil premium, boys and those students who are disabled or who have special educational needs, is too slow.
- Leaders have not taken the actions needed to improve teaching and achievement, particularly in English, quickly enough.
- Teachers do not always get the best out of students because they do not provide enough challenge and do not capture their interest.
- Marking of students' work varies too much in quality between subjects and teachers.
- Behaviour requires improvement because fixed-term exclusions and the proportion of students who are persistently absent are too high.
- The sixth form requires improvement because there is not enough good teaching and students do not make the progress they should.
- Governors do not check that the leaders are doing the right things to bring about improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders, including the governing body, are implementing a clear action plan and this is leading to improvements in the quality of learning and students' attendance.
- The school promotes high quality spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students feel safe.
- There are examples of effective teaching in mathematics and science.
- Systems for checking students' progress and for setting them targets are now being used better to support the learning of students in all subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 42 lessons, of which 16 were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, they made a number of additional visits to assemblies, tutorial sessions and carried out short visits to classrooms across a range of subject areas.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the Chair and other members of the governing body, and the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors spoke to students in lessons, at break and at lunchtimes. They also spoke to four groups of students representing all year groups in the school.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation, including the school's checks of how well it is doing, the school improvement plan, and statistical information about students' progress, achievement, behaviour and exclusions. They scrutinised the work of students.
- Inspectors looked at the school's documentation relating to the management of the work of staff, training arrangements for teachers and other staff, lesson observations, the safeguarding of students and governance.
- Inspectors took into account the 82 responses to the online questionnaire Parent View.

Inspection team

Christine Young, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Victor Chaffey	Additional Inspector
Justine Hocking	Additional Inspector
Colin Money	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- Ferndown Upper School is an average-sized, mixed, 14 to 19 comprehensive school serving the area of East Dorset.
- Almost all students are of White British heritage and the percentage of students from ethnic groups or whose first language is not English is much lower than the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average. (This is additional money allocated by the government for looked after children, those known to be eligible for free school meals and children from service families.)
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported by school action is above the national average.
- The proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school is a member of the East Dorset Education Partnership.
- A small number of students follow an alternative curriculum working within school and with local business.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum levels expected for students' attainment and progress for secondary schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching across all subjects, especially in English, so that it is consistently good by:
 - ensuring teachers use the information about how well students are doing to plan lessons that help all students learn more, especially the most and least able
 - making sure that the work set for students is always set at the right level so that all students, including those who are disabled and those with special educational needs, achieve as well as they can
 - ensuring that activities and approaches used in lessons capture students' interests and help them become more involved in their learning and think for themselves
 - ensuring that marking gives students clear and detailed feedback on how well they are doing, and information about how to improve their work, reach their targets and understand examination requirements
 - improving the consistency in performance in the sixth form by eradicating the variances of teaching between AS and A2 examination courses.
- Raise attainment and accelerate progress for all groups of students, especially boys, the most-able, students who are eligible for the pupil premium, disabled students and those who have special educational needs, across a range of subjects, especially in English, by:
 - ensuring the gaps in attainment and progress between different groups of students across

the school are narrowed so that they all achieve well

- ensuring that students who are persistently absent achieve better examination results by attending more regularly and that strategies are in place to ensure they catch up
 - reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions so that all students are able to achieve their potential by being in school and attending lessons.
- Ensure leaders and managers, including governors, secure more rapid improvements by:
- increasing the pace with which changes are introduced to improve achievement and progress
 - ensuring there is greater consistency in the quality of teaching and marking across all subjects
 - developing the skills of governors so that they can check that leaders are bringing about necessary improvements
 - sharing more widely the good practice that currently exists in school.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.
- An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is inadequate

- Students' progress is inadequate, particularly in English. Over the past three years, the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics has been consistently below national averages. In 2013, the proportion of students attaining A* to C grades in English was below average. These results also highlighted a large gap in the attainment of boys.
- A significant number of students from different groups, including boys, the most able, disabled students and those who have special educational needs, as well as those students who are eligible for the pupil premium have underachieved across a range of subjects for the past three years.
- Lesson observations and scrutiny of students' work show some improvements in students' progress. However, for current students there remain too many gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding that are not closing quickly enough. Students of all abilities are not making enough progress in English and mathematics.
- In the sixth form the quality of teaching at AS and A2 level varies too much. As a result, achievement is inconsistent within and across different subjects. For example, in 2013 the proportion of A* to B grades increased at A2 level but decreased at AS level. However, students following work related courses are particularly motivated, engaged and interested and make good progress.
- A small number of students who follow an alternative curriculum in school succeed and achieve well.
- As part of changes to address underachievement, teaching time has been increased in mathematics, English and science from September 2013. It is too early to judge the full impact of this action on students' achievement. However, there are signs from checking students' progress that improvements are positive, including in English. This was confirmed by lesson observations and scrutiny of work.
- A third of students enter the school with reading ages well below their chronological ages. The school introduced a literacy programme in 2012, especially targeted at boys, which is beginning to demonstrate progress in reading in Key Stage 3.
- The school is using pupil premium funding to provide targeted support for students. This includes additional coaching and resources. There is mixed success. The targeted support is proving effective in mathematics where the gap in performance between those known to be eligible for free school meals and their classmates is decreasing and is now equivalent to half a GCSE grade. However, for English the gap in performance is narrowing too slowly with students being at least one GCSE grade behind their classmates.
- The most able students in Year 10 are entered early for GCSE mathematics. The school is able to demonstrate that this strategy has had a positive impact on students' achievement as all students successfully achieved GCSE A* to C grades in 2013; this allows them the opportunity to attempt GCSE further mathematics at the end of Year 11.

The quality of teaching is inadequate

- The quality of teaching and learning in the school is inadequate. The lack of consistent good teaching over recent years has contributed to underachievement for nearly all groups of students.
- When planning lessons, not enough attention is given to meeting the needs of the particular students in the class. Teachers are provided with information about how individual students are progressing, and about their different learning needs. However, teachers do not always use this information and often give all students the same work regardless of their ability. As a result, work is often either not hard enough, especially for the more able students, or it is too difficult for others, including the least able.
- Teaching does not sufficiently focus on the individual needs of those students who are eligible for the pupil premium funding; this leads to insufficient progress being made across a range of subjects, which leads to their progress being behind that of their classmates.
- Over time, teaching in English has been a particular weakness. The newly appointed head of English and Communications has made rapid changes to teaching strategies, and together with new teaching staff in the English department, has ensured previous under achievement is now being tackled. Work is more focused on raising levels of achievement and progress for all groups of students. This work is new and while it is too early to measure its impact on results in national tests it has begun to improve the quality of learning in the English department.
- In the lessons where teachers aim high and make strenuous efforts to help, students enjoy lessons and work hard. Teachers adapt tasks and use methods that meet students' different needs. Clear explanations are given about what needs to be done to be successful, with reference, where appropriate, to examination or course requirements. This was evident in a Year 10 English lesson where students made perceptive points in a class debate about the influence of the media on society; this resulted in an articulate and well-informed discussion enabling all students to write effectively and with confidence.
- The quality of teachers' marking and feedback varies in its effectiveness across the school. Some students' work, in different subjects, is marked regularly and they are provided with helpful comments outlining what they need to do to improve. This dialogue enables students to improve their work and make good progress. However, other work, for example in English, is not marked regularly or receives no more than a tick. Where marking is of this standard, students do not know how to make their work better in order to reach higher grades.
- A range of ideas has recently been introduced to support the needs of different groups of students including those who are disabled and who have special educational needs. This is enabling some to make better progress but teachers are not always providing these students with work set at the right level to consolidate this work.
- Where teaching and learning are more successful, relationships between students and staff are respectful and they appreciate the extra help and support they get from teachers. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to give clear explanations and question students to develop their understanding.
- Teaching assistants, who work collaboratively with the teacher, are effective especially when

they support students working on their tasks in lessons. Not all teaching assistants work closely enough with the class teacher to plan how to support individual students' learning and as a result, progress for these students slows.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Attendance is below the national average and has been over recent years; however, as a result of efforts to help both students and their parents understand the importance of coming to school, attendance is improving although persistent absence is still high. Analysis of current data show that poor attendance is often linked to students' underachievement.
- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Fixed-term exclusions are above average. Internal exclusions, where the school provides support and guidance for students who have presented challenging behaviours in classroom situations, are also high. The number of students who have special educational needs who spend time in the school's internal exclusion unit or on fixed-term exclusion is very high.
- Students' attitudes to learning are directly linked with the quality of teaching. When teaching is good, students work hard and show high levels of motivation to succeed. When teaching is not good, students become disengaged and lack focus.
- Students' behaviour when moving around school is orderly and well supervised. Behaviour in lessons is generally good; students say that disruption in class is uncommon and when it does occur teachers deal with it effectively.
- Relationships between staff and students are a strength of the school, and the vast majority of students are polite, helpful, courteous and well mannered. They are interesting to talk to and enjoy their experiences of school. Students consider that their school provides a happy and secure place to be.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Parents who completed the online questionnaire Parent View say that their children are both happy and safe at school. Students say they feel safe, happy and are rightly proud of their school. If there are any behavioural incidents, students say these are dealt with promptly and effectively. If any bullying occurs it is dealt with quickly by the school. Students are well aware of the different types of bullying and have a good level of understanding of safety issues, including e-safety.
- The school's pastoral system is strong and promotes good behaviour. Students appreciate that the school rules are applied consistently and fairly. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are closely monitored and their development is carefully nurtured. The school has effective systems for tracking behaviour and dealing with misbehaviour.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because the school's performance has declined since its previous inspection and leaders have not been effective in tackling students' underachievement. Over the past year, however, leaders have made demonstrable improvements to the quality of learning and students' attendance.

- Despite the serious weaknesses that exist, there is evidence that leaders demonstrate the capacity to improve. Aspects of students' poor achievement, especially in English, have begun to improve and assessment information on students' progress is used more effectively by most staff to target help where needed. As a result, leaders are beginning to minimise the impact of weaker teaching on student's learning. However, it is too early to measure the full impact of these measures on achievement.
- School leaders' assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses is honest but not always accurate. Making good use of information about students' progress to judge how well the school is doing is not yet fully embedded with all leaders so that they can take full responsibility for achievement and progress in their subjects and areas of responsibility. This means that the school does not identify priorities for improvement as sharply as it should. It also means that weaknesses are not tackled as quickly as they should be.
- Underachievement by different groups means that the school does not adequately promote equality of opportunity.
- The headteacher has a clear vision, focused on creating a positive atmosphere conducive to learning, raising achievement and improving teaching. He has led range of appropriate improvements. Including strengthening senior leadership, the leadership of the English department and the quality of its staffing. He has appointed three additional learning mentors with responsibility to work with those students eligible for the pupil premium in order to boost attainment in English and mathematics. Nevertheless, it is too soon to demonstrate the full impact of these initiatives.
- A range of measures including curriculum change now provide for a wider range of student abilities. Academic tutoring which is targeted at boys with poor literacy skills is enabling their progress to be tracked. This is beginning to have a positive influence on their reading ability.
- The headteacher and the leadership team recognise that despite the improvements made the pace of change needs to be faster. Consequently they have sought additional support and have formed a school improvement link with a nearby outstanding school. The school is also part of the East Dorset Education Partnership, which is supporting the school improvement programme to implement change successfully.
- Roles and responsibilities have been clarified and the headteacher is effectively challenging those members of staff who are not performing effectively, in the classroom or in their management responsibilities. The school has introduced a more robust system for setting targets for teachers, which is accurate and clearly identifies the skills teachers need to improve. The training programme has a strong focus on the development of middle leaders and improving teaching. It is supported well by the school.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Students often have the opportunity to reflect on and consider their spiritual development and this is well supported by a programme of assemblies and personal, social and health education. Students work well with each other and show consideration. The school's specialism of visual arts, combined with a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, makes a genuine and positive addition to the cultural life of the school through concerts and other performances, some of which involve linking with feeder primary schools. Students appreciate the extra time spent by the teachers who offer or help with extra-curricular activities.

- Safeguarding policies, practice and child-protection arrangements meet statutory requirements and ensure that students are safe.

- **The governance of the school:**

- Governors do not hold the leaders effectively to account for the performance of the school. They have not sufficiently challenged the underachievement in previous years. Neither have they effectively questioned the school's over-generous assessments of how well it is doing.
- Governors are very supportive, experienced and bring an appropriate range of skills to their role. They are fully trained and take their roles and responsibilities very seriously.
- The training governors have received in key areas of the school's work means they are taking steps to help them hold the school more rigorously to account for its performance. For example, they are able to interpret the data that the school makes available to them. Also, by visiting lessons and talking to both students and teachers, the governors keep abreast of the quality of teaching and how well the school is doing. However, it is too early to see the impact of this work.
- Governors understand the process of setting targets for teachers in the school and how the appraisal of teachers' performance is used to reward good performance and tackle underperformance. They are determined to continue the development of improvements being made.
- Governors understand the pupil premium funding and are informed as to how the spending of this money is used to improve the performance of those students who are eligible for its support. However, they do not know the impact of this spending.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	113854
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	429615

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	989
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Moss
Headteacher	Alex Wills
Date of previous school inspection	November 2010
Telephone number	01202 871243
Fax number	01202 893383
Email address	school@fernup.dorset.sch.uk

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